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CULT OF AHIMSA
OR
NON-VIOLENCE

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IN THE CHAIR

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दयामय बना हृदय, जग को देख प्रेममय ।
सीख यह पाट फूलसे, प्रेम जो करता शूलसे ॥
लेखक !

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श्रीराम सनातन

The Cult of Ahimsa or Non-violence.

In order to know what Ahimsa (अहिंसा) or non-violence means it is necessary to give the etymological interpretation of the term. It is derived from the root हिंस् to kill. न हिनस्ति or अहिंसा therefore means not to cause injury which, according to developed meaning, means not to cause pain either by word, thought or deed.

And before mentioning anything about the life or ethico-religious principles of Gautama and Jnatriputra who were principally responsible for the popularisation of the idea of अहिंसा (Ahimsa) it is worthwhile to make a short reference to the cultural and religious background that existed before them and to see whether the philosophy of that time in any way included Himsa or violence in its cult. It is this violence which has made the life of individuals as well as nations miserable. Do we not suffer its repurcussions even today ?

The philosophy or religion that existed in India before the birth of Jainism or Buddhism was Indo-Aryan in character.

This Indo-Aryan philosophy which dates as for back as the migration of Aryans to Afghanistan and upper parts of the Punjab and synchronises with earliest compositions of the Rigveda can claim to be, if not older, but as old as 3000 B. C. The Aryans had to fight but they did not posses a philosophic out-look to which can be attributed the idea of **Himsa** "Killing, effecting injury or violence" as a part of the cult.

This Indo-Aryan philosophy or call it Hindu philosophy has passed through three stages. Vedic stage, upnishadic stage and epic stage. A brief outline of all the three stages is summarised below.

Vedic stage-Though in the Rigveda the earliest of vedas highly philosophic hymns like the Creation Hymn existed, the philosophic outlook was chiefly polytheistic. A quatrain of this hymn reads :

नासदासी न्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो न व्योमा परो यत् । किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्न् अम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥	Non-being then existed not, nor being; There was no air, nor heaven which is beyond it. What motion was there ? where? By whom directed? Was water there unfathomable profound !

This was a time when other world philosophies were yet to be born and other religions had not seen their day. A look into these vedic hymns and songs shows that the method of worship adopted then did not encourage violence. A hymn from the Yajurveda begins.

अत्याशनादतीपानाद्
यच्चउग्रात्प्रतिग्रहात् ।
तन्मे वरुणो राजा
पाणिना ह्यवमर्शतु ॥

Whatever sin there is in me as a result of overeating and overdrinking and receiving from him who lives by violence to others that sin may King Varuna wipe off with his own hand.

Violence is out of question. Prayers were offered for being saved from the food of those living by violence.

With the development of philosophic thougnt the polytheism matured into pantheism. A quatrain from the famous **Pursha** hymn of the Rigveda reads:

सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः
सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात्
स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वा-
त्यतिष्टद्दशाङ्गुलम् ।

Thousand handed was Purusha Thousand eyed, thousand footed, He having covered the earth on all sides extended beyond it the length of ten fingers.

Upanishadic stage- At this stage the philosophic thought is all the more developed. Monism is in view. Svetasvatara upanishad reads:

य एकोऽवर्णो बहुधा शक्ति योगाद् वर्णान नेकान नि-हितार्थो दधाति । विचैति चान्ते विश्वामादौ स देवः स नो बुद्ध्या शुभया संयु-नक्तु ॥

He who is one and undefined, who by his manifold creative power, assumes a variety of forms without any purpose for himself, creates the universe in the beginning and, in the end, withdraws the whole of it, may that God unite us with a good mind.

The crux of upanishadic philosophy is "Behold, all beings in the self and the self in all beings." This idea compared to the Biblical idea "Love thy neighbour as thy self" conveys a deeper significance.

Epic stage- This is the period of Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is no time to go in detail to discuss the time and philosophy of this age. This covers a period before 400 B.C. The epic age gave terse philosophic ideas of the vedic period a theistic touch. The philosophy of this period was monotheistic. In Ramayana, Rama becomes an Avatar and

in Mahabharata, Krishna becomes an Avatar. Ramayana preceded Mahabharata. How high the morals of Rama were can be borne out by the following verse which Kaikeyi his step mother who was responsible for his banishment says in his praise.

"न रामः परदारांश्च चर्क्षुभ्यामपि पश्यति"

"Rama would not even look at other's wives." To Krishna is attributed the Bhagvadgita. In its first discourse the words addressed by Arjuna to Krishna closely show how strong the ideas of Ahimsa were at that time.

"एतान्न हन्तु मिच्छामि घ्नतोपि मधुसूदन ।
अपि त्रैलोक्य राज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते ॥

O Madhasudan! even though they kill me I do not want to kill them for the Kingdom of three worlds not to speak of the rule of this earth.

In Discourse Sixteenth of the Bhagvadgita Lord Krishna while describing the divine qualities of a spiritually gifted being lays great stress on:

अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम् ।
दया भूतेश्वलो लुप्त्वं मार्दवं ह्रीरचापलम् ॥

Non violence, truth, angerlessness, selflessness, peace, talking ill of no-body, compassin on all beings, firm mindedness, softness, modesty and non-ficklenss.

The life of both these great souls (Rama & Krishna) proves that they did not kill life to enjoy.

Why Hindu religion allowed Buddhism and Jainism to raise their head for some centuries is a result of the conditions prevailing during that age. The Vedanta philosophy contained abstruse and subtle ideas, at the hands of priest-craft the Hindu religion had become highly ritualistic and the caste system had created segregation camps, it was natural therefore that any anti-priest-craft movement which exhibited selflessness and had equal values for the masses would be welcomed by the public, more so, if instead of probing into philosophic niceties and delicacies it showed the people the right conduct of living: laid more stress on ethics than on religion.

Gautama Buddha, Sidhartha or more reverentially known as "Sakyamuni" belonged to ruling family of Kapilvastu in United Provinces. According to the evidence available to date he is said to have died at the age of 80 years in 543 B.C. at Kusinagra. The pain and sufferings of the world made him quit his princely life in

search of truth and light came to him by offering severest penance under a tree in Gaya. Filled with light he began to preach his gospel first at Benares. This is the beginning of Buddhism. Tripitaka and Dhammapada are the most important religious texts of Bhikhshus or followers of Buddhism. The keynote of Buddhistic ethics is Ahimsa, non-killing or non-violence and compassion which in other words can be classed as love. Dhammapada reads:-

सब्बसो नाम-रूपस्मिं यस्स नत्थि ममायितं । असता च न सोचति स वे भिक्खूति वुच्चति ॥

One who has nothing of his own as possession in the world, who is not grieved on the non-possession of anything is a Bhikhshu.

यतो यतो हिंसमनो निवत्तति ततो ततो सम्मति एव दुक्खं ॥

Wherever the mind refuses to inflict injury it adds to lessening the suffering.

Or in a more remarkable saying :-

निधाय दण्डं भूतेसु तसेसु थावरेसु च । यो न हन्ति न घातेति तमहं ब्रूमि ब्राह्मणे ॥

One who does not inflict injury on living or non-living beings nor influences others to effect injury is a Brahmana or wise.

To lead man to perfection the Buddha preached "Noble Eightfold Path"

अष्टांगिक मार्ग–सम्यक् दृष्टि, सम्यक् संकल्प, सम्यक् वाणी, सम्यक् कर्मान्त. सम्यक् आजीविका, सम्यक् व्ययाम, सम्यक् स्मृति, सम्यक् समाधि–

Right views, Right aspirations, Right speech, Right conduct, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindedness and Right rapture.

It was this appeal to right conduct that made Buddhism a popular religion which has millions of followers outside India.

Here we are not to discuss the philosophic delicacies of Buddhism and Jainism. We have to learn what is best among them and to inculcate that to make our living happy.

The founder of Jainism whose day is being celebrated here this evening, was Nataputta in Sanskrit Jnatri-putra more popularly known as Mahabir Vardhamana. He was a well-to-do person of Vaisali the modern Basar in the vicinity of Patna. He gave up his home and followed the ascetic order of a saint Parsva Nath. When he became perfect he

began to deliver his messages at the age of forty. This continued for a period of 30 years till South Bihar, Patna and other neighbouring places came under his influence. It is popularly accepted that he died in 527 B.C.

While Tri-Ratna or Three Jewels of Buddhistic faith are Buddha, Dharma (Law) and the Sangha (order of monks) to the Jains they are Right faith, Right cognition and Right morals. Injunctions for Arhatas the followers of Jainism are given in Uttardhyayana and Mahavaggo.

In Uttardhyayana it is said :- "Karman is the root of birth and death and birth and death they call misery". A Jain "believes in the soul, believes in the world, believes in the reward and believes in action". Compassion and Ahimsa are the essence of Jain ethics.

And the quintessence of wisdom according to Jainism is given in the following :- " Not to kill anything, know this to be the legitimate conclusion from the reciprocity with regard to non-killing ".

A human being should therefore "Cease

to injure living beings whether they move or not on high, below and on earth. For this has been called the Nirvana which consists in peace".

This spirit of compassion developed to this extent among the Jains that one school of followers refused clothes even to themselves. These were called **Digambaras.**

Instances can be quoted to show that a truly non-violent heart has never suffered violence. Swami Ram Tirth was once face to face with a tiger. Did it eat him ? In his famous Dandi march Mahatma Gandhi took a step which was against the established laws of the land. He did not come to grief for it for this was done out of pity for the poor and his movements were non-violent.

Christian ethics too has the same keynote about morality and conduct and non-violence is eulogised there too. In his famous sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ says:- "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven."

"Thou shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement.

"That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Coming back to Buddhism and Jainism and later upheavels it may be said that what led to the decay of these religions was the under-current of priest-craft which had not lost its influence and the agression of Muslim Rulers.

In 800 A.D. Kumarilla Bhatta, in 900 A. D. Shankracharya and in 1100 A. D. Ramanuja systematised and coordinated the vast field of Hindu philosophic ideas. The Brahmanas re-established themselves. Shradhā or faith of the Vedic period was substituted by Bhavana or contemplation. Vaishnavite Bhakti became the order of the day all over India. In South and Kashmir Shaivism had the upper hand. Appar kindled new fire in South and Utpala and Abhinava Gupta laid the foundation of a new philosophical system in Kashmir. Sings Utpala :-

दुखागमोपि भूयान्मे
त्वद्भक्तिभरितात्मनः ।
तत्पराची विभो माभूद-
पि सौख्य परम्परा ॥

To me laden with your devotion, let there be even a calamity but not even a succession of rejoicings inimical to your devotion, O Lord !

Post-Ramanuja period saw the growth of Bakhti philosophy. Bhavana or contemplation was substituted by Bhakti or devotion. These Bhaktas gained control on the public mind as they appealed to them in their language.

Ramananda a Hindi poet and a great Bhakta was born in Allahabad in 1360 A.D. He is the founder of this Bhakti movement. His disciple Kabir the weaver-poet of Benares gave this movement a great fillip. This Bhakti movement of India, Sufistic movement of Persia and Christian mysticism have existed side by side.

Love and love and love is what they sing. Says Kabir :-

सती को कौन सिखावत है
संग स्वामी के तन जराना
जी। प्रेम को कौन सिखावत
है त्याग माहि भोगका पाना
जी ॥

Who teaches a Sati to burn herself with her master? Who teaches love to enjoy peace in renunciation.

Surdas says :—

"जित देखूँ तित श्याममयी है-" Wherever I look I find Shyama". He had lost himself in Shyama.

Similar are the views of Maulana Rumi.

In a poem addressed to flute he says :-

آتش عشق است کاندر نے فتاد
جوشش عشق است کاندر مے فتاد

It is the fire of love that fills the flute.
It is the fire of love that shines in wine.

But more appealing is the song of Blake addressed to "The Lamb". It is so interesting that I must quote it whole.

"Little Lamb who made thee ?
Dost thou know who made thee ?
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,
By the stream and over the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight;
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice ?
Little Lamb, who made thee ?
Dost thou know who made thee ?
Little Lamb I will tell thee,
Little Lamb I will tell thee,
He is called by thy name,
For he calls Himself a Lamb,
He is meek and He is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child and thou a Lamb,
We are called by his name,
Little Lamb God bless thee !
Little Lamb God bless thee !

Even in the remote corner of Kashmir, Lalleshwari a fourteenth century mystic preached equality and love. A quatrain from her Kashmiri songs reads :-

पर त पान यमि समुय मोन
यमि हिडुय मोन द्यन किहो
राथ। यमिसय अडुय मन
सोंपुन तमी ड्यूठुय सुर
गुरु नाथ ॥

He who feels his own self and that of others as one, feels no difference between night and day and whose mind has reached a non-dualistic plane he alone has seen the Lord of Gods.

It was this ecstasy that made her move about unclothed.

I think I have taken sufficient time. It is needless to reiterate that violence begets violence and love must invite love. An act or creation of violence can never have universal appeal. Big battles have never won the hearts of all. But Goethe's Faust, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Kalidasa's Megha Duta and Tagore's Gitanjali have invited equal appreciation because these are creations of art and not arms manufactured at arsenals for human destruction.

That Hindu philosophy has never preached violence can be corroborated by the daily prayers offered by Hindus. It

will be clear that prayers are offered for the peace of even such small entities as forest herbs :-

शिवमस्तु सर्व जगतां
परहितनिरता भवन्तु भूत-
गणाः । दोषाः प्रयान्तु
शान्तिं सर्वत्र सुखी भवतु
लोकः ॥ (Maltimadhava)

May there be welfare to the whole world;
May all beings devote themselves to doing good to others,
May all evils subside;
May the world be in all ways happy.

and the famous Shanti Path of the Atharvaveda is:-

पृथिवी शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं
शान्तिः द्यौश्शान्तिः आपः
शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः
वनस्पतयः शान्तिः विश्वे
मे देवाः शान्तिः सर्वे मे
देवाः शान्तिः शान्तिः
शान्तिः शान्तिभिः । ताभिः
शान्तिभिः सर्वशान्तिभिः
शमयामोहं यदिह घोरं
यदिह क्रूरं यदिह पापं
तच्छान्तं तच्छिवं सर्वमेव
शमस्तु नः ॥
(Atharvaveda)

Peace earth, peace atmosphere, peace heavens, peace water, peace herbs, peace trees, peace may all the Gods be to me ! Peace, peace through all this peace. With all this peace, may we bring to peace whatever here is terrible, is cruel, is sinful. May all that be to us tranquil, benevolent, peaceful.